

## ISAIAH CHAPTER 64

# SIN REQUIRES PUNISHMENT

After having spoken of God's goodness and past faithfulness to Israel for the sake of His glory in the first verses of chapter 63, Isaiah then began offering a prayer in verse 15 of repentance on behalf of the nation in its dismal condition in verse 15. Just as God came down in fire at Sinai when He gave the Ten Commandments to Moses (Exodus 19:16–19), Isaiah is asking Him to come down again and reveal His awesome power to the rest of the world who trust in dead idols. Then they would see what the living God of Israel can do.<sup>1</sup> That prayer is continued here in chapter 64.

As Isaiah continues this prayer on behalf of a small number of Jewish people, who will be referred to as a *remnant* in future verses, let us remember that they're offering this prayer for the entire Jewish nation, and what we're reading is taking place around 700 B.C. Jerusalem is in grave danger of being conquered by Assyria and Isaiah has already told the people that they will be going into exile in Babylon in about a hundred years because of their continuous disobedience. Most of the people of Jerusalem scoffed at these words because they felt that God would save them under any circumstances because they were His people and descendants of Abraham. They just didn't ever seem to want to get God's message straight. However, as always throughout the history of the Jewish people, there was a small number, a *remnant*, who did listen and who did believe Isaiah had been speaking for God. It is that remnant in Isaiah's time for whom Isaiah offers this plea to God for the entire nation. And it is to this remnant that God answers. So let's begin chapter 64, remembering that Isaiah is praying.

Isaiah 64:1-6 NAS:

*1 Oh, that You would rend the heavens and come down, That the mountains might quake at Your presence—*

*2 As fire kindles the brushwood, as fire causes water to boil— To make Your name known to Your adversaries, That the nations may tremble at Your presence!*

*3 When You did awesome things which we did not expect, You came down, the mountains quaked at Your presence.*

*4 For from days of old they have not heard or perceived by ear, Nor has the eye seen a God besides You, Who acts in behalf of the one who waits for Him.*

*5 You meet him who rejoices in doing righteousness, Who remembers You in Your ways. Behold, You were angry, for we sinned, We continued in*

---

<sup>1</sup> Wiersbe, Warren W.: Be Comforted. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1992 (An Old Testament Study), S. Is 63:1

*them a long time; And shall we be saved?*

*6 For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; And all of us wither like a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.*

Isaiah asks God to “look down” in Isaiah 63:15, and here in Isaiah 64:1 to “come down.” As we pointed out last time, this is one of the greatest “revival prayers” found in the Bible.

Isaiah pleads for God to intervene on the world scene and to display his power, justice, and goodness, in an extraordinary manner, so that all people, including the Jews, would acknowledge that He is the one and only true God. Fire and boiling water in verse 2 picture judgment. *The awesome things* in verse 3 probably refer to the phenomena of fire, darkness, and earthquake when God gave the Mosaic Law from Mount Sinai. This prayer in Isaiah recalls the occurrences the people observed when God met with Moses on Mount Sinai and they were at the bottom of the mountain. They here also ask God to burst forth from Heaven in judgment and crush their enemies, as He did in Sodom and Gomorrah (Deuteronomy 4:11-13, Exodus 19:16-19; Genesis 19:24,25). Have you ever felt like that? Don’t you feel a bit like that now with all that’s going on in the Middle East?

Isaiah pleads for God to do what He had done for His people Israel when He brought them out of Egypt. God made great men that seemed as strong as mountains fall before Israel, and great opposition to give way.<sup>2</sup>

One day during the end times, God will make His name known to His enemies and force those to tremble at His presence who would not come and worship in His presence. Yet throughout history God has blessed those who believe in Him and who therefore are willing to do what is right. Men and women have not heard nor seen what God has prepared for those that wait for him, that obey Him God has prepared wonders for those that fear Him and trust in Him.<sup>3</sup>

Here we see what God expects from us in order to have communion with Him. We must first make every effort to do the right thing in the eyes of God. Secondly, We must be cheerful in our work and we must rejoice and work righteousness. We must delight ourselves in God and in His law. We must be cheerful as we serve Him. God loves a cheerful giver and a cheerful worshipper. We must serve the Lord with gladness (2 Corinthians 9:7; Psalm 100:2). Thirdly, We must accept all the ways He chooses to deal with us. We must remember His ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8,9) and be prepared for whatever He sends our way. We must obey God and thank Him when He blesses us (1 Thessalonians 5:18). When God blesses us with prosperity we should express our joy to Him. When He sends trials our way, we should respond with patience and submission to His perfect will (1 Peter 4:12-14).

---

<sup>2</sup> See Jdg. 5:4, 5; Ps. 68:7, 8.

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 31:19; 1 Corinthians 2:9.

Isaiah and this remnant of Jews are willing to confess their sin, spiritual uncleanness, weakness, and lack of prayer. In addition, they didn't blame God for their dreadful condition. They knew that their desperate situation was because of their sins. Therefore they could only depend on God's faithfulness and promises.

Isaiah 64:7-12 NAS:

*7 There is no one who calls on Your name, Who arouses himself to take hold of You; For You have hidden Your face from us And have delivered us into the power of our iniquities.*

*8 But now, O Lord, You are our Father, We are the clay, and You our potter; And all of us are the work of Your hand.*

*9 Do not be angry beyond measure, O Lord, Nor remember iniquity forever; Behold, look now, all of us are Your people.*

*10 Your holy cities have become a wilderness, Zion has become a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation.*

*11 Our holy and beautiful house, Where our fathers praised You, Has been burned by fire; And all our precious things have become a ruin.*

*12 Will You restrain Yourself at these things, O Lord? Will You keep silent and afflict us beyond measure?*

This prayer recognizes God as a potter in control of the clay and pleads for Him to do a saving work. Let's look over at Isaiah 55:6,7 NAS for a moment:

*6 Seek the Lord while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near.*

*7 Let the wicked forsake his way And the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the Lord, And He will have compassion on him, And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.*

An answer to the kind of pleading we see described here and that Isaiah is making in his prayer in chapter 64 can't occur apart from the powerful conviction and awakening of the sinful heart by the Holy Spirit.

These final verses of this remarkable prayer by Isaiah and those Jews who trust in God are a statement of that trust in God. The remnant addressed God as their Father in Isaiah 63:16 and here in 64:8 as the Potter. The remnant confessed to God that they were clay in His hands and could change them if He so desired (29:16; 45:9). Therefore the remnant would obediently and submissively ask the Lord to withhold His anger and to look on Israel (63:15) as His own.

Now we come to a very tricky transition going from verse 10 to 11. Up until this point Isaiah's prayer on the part of the Jewish people could apply to the time in which he is writing or any time in the future of Israel, including the end times. However, in verse 11 he describes an event that won't actually occur until the Babylonian captivity 100 years later in 586 B.C. Isaiah was again taking the people forward to show them what is going

to happen to Israel because of her sin and disobedience, but that even in spite of the dark days of captivity ahead, there would still be hope for the nation. When those who read these verses during the future captivity realize that Isaiah was predicting the future when he wrote these verses, they'll know that his predictions came true. So if he could predict the captivity itself, his prediction about the end of the captivity and the future hope of Israel would come true as well. So when Jews read these verses at any time, now or in the future, they can be assured that God still loves them and offers them hope. We'll see as we get into chapter 65 that God's promises as always are unchangeable and His promises to Israel remain unchanged, but the fulfillment of those promises is based on Israel's choices. When God first made the covenant with Israel through Moses at Mount Sinai, the deal was that if Israel chose to trust and obey God, they would be blessed. If they chose to do things their own way and be disobedient, they would be punished.

Isaiah continues his prayer reminding God that Israel's cities including Jerusalem had been destroyed and that even the temple had been burned by His enemies. The remnant would urge God to do something about the situation, and thereby break His silence (62:1; 65:6) and withhold His punishment on Israel.<sup>4</sup>

Why would God not work wonders? Because the people had sinned (Isaiah 64:5–6) and must confess their sins and turn from them if they wanted God to act on their behalf. If our *righteousness* is filthy rags, what must our *sins* look like in God's sight? According to verse 4, God has planned wonderful things for His people beyond their imagination, but their sins prevent Him from sharing His blessings.<sup>5</sup> Is there any hope? Yes, because God is a forgiving Father and a patient Potter (Jeremiah 18). He can cleanse us and make us new if we will let Him have His way. This prayer of the believing remnant ends with a question: Why is God silent? His temple has been destroyed, His glorious land has been ravaged, and His people are in exile. "*Will You restrain Yourself at these things, O Lord? Will You keep silent and afflict us beyond measure?*" God's reply is found in the next two chapters.

## Isaiah Chapter 65

---

<sup>4</sup> Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 1:1119

<sup>5</sup> See 1 Cor. 2:9 and Eph. 3:20–21.

Here we reach the climax of Isaiah's teaching in the promise that God will one day create a new earth and heavens as the home of the righteous believers. But judgment will precede salvation, as again Israel is pictured as obstinate and sinful (65:1-7). Yet God will preserve a remnant (verses 8-10) while turning against the rebels among His people and punishing them (verses 11-16). Then Isaiah introduces the great promise, marked by the cry, "*Behold!*" God will create "*new heavens and a new earth*" where His people will enjoy long lives in peace and security (verses 17-25). Thus, men and women can look to the future with both fear and hope. God, the Creator, extends the offer of fellowship to the humble who are responsive to His Word (66:1-6). Zion is told to rejoice, confident that all her troubles are but birth pangs, and soon she will give birth to a glorious future (verses 7-11). God will bless His land with peace and comfort His children in the day He executes judgment on sin (verses 12-16).

God pledges that all mankind, including the Jewish people, will meet Him at history's end. During the Millennium the heavens and the earth will be remodeled. But those who rebelled against the Lord will be held in bondage until the day of judgment (verses 17-24).

Isaiah's vision reaches out beyond time and stretches into eternity. He sees not only a renewal of our earth and the heavens under the Messiah's earthly reign, but further still he glimpses a totally new creation which of course is Heaven. The New Testament joins the Old Testament in looking forward to just such an event. Peter says this in 2 Peter 3:10, 13: "*These heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. In keeping with His promise God will create a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness*"

And the Apostle John reaffirms the vision, reporting in Revelation 21:1: "*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.*" When the grand drama of sin and redemption has been played out, the curtain will fall. But then a new curtain will rise, a play whose glories we cannot even imagine will open.<sup>6</sup>

Isaiah 65:1-7 NAS:

- 1 *"I permitted Myself to be sought by those who did not ask for Me; I permitted Myself to be found by those who did not seek Me. I said, 'Here am I, here am I,' To a nation which did not call on My name.*
- 2 *"I have spread out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, Who walk in the way which is not good, following their own thoughts,*
- 3 *A people who continually provoke Me to My face, Offering sacrifices in gardens and burning incense on bricks;*
- 4 *Who sit among graves and spend the night in secret places; Who eat swine's flesh, And the broth of unclean meat is in their pots.*
- 5 *"Who say, 'Keep to yourself, do not come near me, For I am holier than*

---

<sup>6</sup> Richards, Larry: The Bible Reader's Companion. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1991, S. 445

*you!’ These are smoke in My nostrils, A fire that burns all the day.*  
*6 “Behold, it is written before Me, I will not keep silent, but I will repay; I*  
*will even repay into their bosom,*  
*7 Both their own iniquities and the iniquities of their fathers together,”*  
*says the Lord. “Because they have burned incense on the mountains And*  
*scorned Me on the hills, Therefore I will measure their former work into*  
*their bosom.”*

Though Israel did acknowledge God’s existence, they did so only superficially. Right from the beginning the Jews didn’t genuinely seek God with their hearts. In the New Testament, Paul clarifies the meaning of Isaiah 65:1 in Romans 10:20, by applying the words in verse 1 to the **Gentiles** who find God only through the work of His sovereign grace. God announces in verse 1 that His salvation will go to the Gentiles even though they did not seek Him or experience the blessings that He gave to Israel. If Israel did not want what God had to offer, then God would offer it to others because the gift was far too precious to go unclaimed.

God had continually taken the initiative in inviting the Jews to obey Him and enjoy the resultant blessings, but time after time they rejected Him. Paul uses verse 2 of Isaiah 65 in Romans 10:21, where he points out the rebelliousness of His fellow Jews. Then God describes the sins of His people that kept Him from answering their prayers. They resisted His grace and His loving appeals, even though He held out His arms to them and spoke to them through His Word. They went their own way (Isaiah 53:6) and provoked Him with their evil worship of false gods, getting involved with the occult and with demons. And yet these rebellious people considered themselves to be better than others because they felt they were a special people, ancestors of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and therefore entitled to salvation.

They continued to be stubborn, independent, and evil. They provoked God by worshiping in pagan gardens (Isaiah 1:29; 66:17); being involved in necromancy;<sup>7</sup> disregarding His dietary laws,<sup>8</sup> and being religiously arrogant until they became as repulsive and irritating to God as is smoke in a person’s nose. Because of their sins God would judge them. The Assyrian threat (Isaiah 1:37) and the Babylonian Exile (chapters 38-66) were two of the ways the Lord disciplined His people. The consequences of sin had to be faced; God would pay them back in judgment for their idolatrous worship. (Isaiah 57:7).<sup>9</sup> So God would not spare the Jewish people as a whole because of their sin. But I’m certain He protected the faithful remnant of people who continued to trust in Him. Even during the Babylonian captivity there were a number of God’s faithful servants who were protected. One example would be the prophet Daniel and his friends.

---

<sup>7</sup> Supposedly consulting the dead, while sitting among the graves, Isaiah 65:4; 8:19.

<sup>8</sup> Isaiah 65:4b; 66:3, 17; Lev. 11:7.

<sup>9</sup> Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 1:1119



It was God's plan, therefore, that when the Jews would reject Christ then the Gentiles would be brought in, and the unfaithful Jews were to be rejected (1-7). Verses 8-10, however, reaffirm the promise of a "*remnant*" of godly Israelites who will be saved in the end times. If we go back to the very beginning of the book, you may recall these words in Isaiah 10:20-23 NLT:

*20 In that day the remnant left in Israel, the survivors in the house of Jacob, will no longer depend on allies who seek to destroy them. But they will faithfully trust the Lord, the Holy One of Israel.*

*21 A remnant will return; yes, the remnant of Jacob will return to the Mighty God.*

*22 But though the people of Israel are as numerous as the sand of the seashore, only a remnant of them will return. The Lord has rightly decided to destroy his people.*

*23 Yes, the Lord, the Lord of Heaven's Armies, has already decided to destroy the entire land.*

God explains, however, that He must judge the nation of Israel for her sins both in Isaiah's day and in the end times. God's response to the prayer asking Him to deliver them is that He will act in judgment, not deliverance, against those who continue in sin and disobedience.

Isaiah 65:8-12 NAS:

*8 Thus says the Lord, "As the new wine is found in the cluster, And one says, 'Do not destroy it, for there is benefit in it,' So I will act on behalf of My servants In order not to destroy all of them.*

*9 "I will bring forth offspring from Jacob, And an heir of My mountains from Judah; Even My chosen ones shall inherit it, And My servants will dwell there.*

*10 "Sharon will be a pasture land for flocks, And the valley of Achor a resting place for herds, For My people who seek Me.*

*11 "But you who forsake the Lord, Who forget My holy mountain, Who set a table for Fortune, And who fill cups with mixed wine for Destiny,  
12 I will destine you for the sword, And all of you will bow down to the slaughter. Because I called, but you did not answer; I spoke, but you did not hear. And you did evil in My sight And chose that in which I did not delight."*

Though judgment was to come upon the whole nation, it would not include all of the people. As a few grapes are left when vineyards are gleaned (Deuteronomy 24:21), so a remnant will be left who will return to the land, those who are referred to as "*heirs of My mountains*." This remnant of people will cultivate the land and pasture their flocks there again. **Sharon**, the coastal plain south of Mount Carmel, is excellent land for agriculture, and the **Valley of Achor** (Hosea 2:15) west of Jericho was known for its sheep-herding.

On the other hand people are destined for slaughter if they do not trust in God. *Fortune* and *Destiny* were names of gods Israel worshiped in her attempts to know the future. Food and drink were set before those idols to seek to please them. Such people, God said, are doomed to die by the sword, for they refused to listen to Him and deliberately chose to go on sinning (Isaiah 66:4).<sup>10</sup>

Isaiah 65:13-16 NAS:

*13 Therefore, thus says the Lord God, "Behold, My servants will eat, but you will be hungry. Behold, My servants will drink, but you will be thirsty. Behold, My servants will rejoice, but you will be put to shame.  
14 "Behold, My servants will shout joyfully with a glad heart, But you will cry out with a heavy heart, And you will wail with a broken spirit.*

*15 "You will leave your name for a curse to My chosen ones, And the Lord God will slay you. But My servants will be called by another name.  
16 "Because he who is blessed in the earth Will be blessed by the God of truth; And he who swears in the earth Will swear by the God of truth;  
Because the former troubles are forgotten, And because they are hidden from My sight!*

Contrasts between people who are God's servants and those who have refused to serve Him are dramatically presented in these verses. His servants will eat, drink, and rejoice, while those who reject God will be hungry, thirsty, and shamed. God's servants will sing for joy whereas those who reject Him will wail, be cursed, and put to death. God's servants will receive another name, that is, will be given a new character that will reflect their favored status among the nations (62:2), and they will take oaths honestly.<sup>11</sup> God will forgive and forget their previous sins because of His grace.<sup>12</sup>

Isaiah 65:17-25 NAS:

*17 "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former things will not be remembered or come to mind.*

*18 "But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; For behold, I create Jerusalem for rejoicing And her people for gladness.*

*19 "I will also rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in My people; And there will no longer be heard in her The voice of weeping and the sound of crying.*

*20 "No longer will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, Or an*

<sup>10</sup> Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 1:1119

<sup>11</sup> By the God of truth; Ps. 31:5.

<sup>12</sup> Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 1:1119



*old man who does not live out his days; For the youth will die at the age of one hundred And the one who does not reach the age of one hundred Will be thought accursed.*

21 *"They will build houses and inhabit them; They will also plant vineyards and eat their fruit.*

22 *"They will not build and another inhabit, They will not plant and another eat; For as the lifetime of a tree, so will be the days of My people, And My chosen ones will wear out the work of their hands.*

23 *"They will not labor in vain, Or bear children for calamity; For they are the offspring of those blessed by the Lord, And their descendants with them.*

24 *"It will also come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear.*

25 *"The wolf and the lamb will graze together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox; and dust will be the serpent's food. They will do no evil or harm in all My holy mountain," says the Lord.*

God saves the best for the last: His description in Isaiah 65:17–66:24 of *"the new heavens and a new earth"* gives us a glimpse of the millennial kingdom. This is not the same as John's *"new heaven and new earth"* in Revelation 21:1ff, because the characteristics Isaiah gives do not fit the eternal state of Heaven which will follow the Millennium. As far as we know, in the eternal state, people will not get old or die, nor will there be any danger of losing anything to invaders. Jerusalem will be a source of joy, not only to God but to the whole earth. It will be a city of holiness, harmony, and happiness. During the millennial kingdom people will work and God will bless their labors. Death will occur but not nearly as early as in the time of Isaiah. During the Millennium a sinful person may die at age 100, but will be considered a mere youth at the time of his premature death. Having died an untimely death at such a youthful age, it will be assumed that God has taken his life because of sin. Nature will be at peace because the curse will have been reversed during the Millennium. However, it will not be removed until Heaven.

During the Millennium Jerusalem will be a place of joy. Also God Himself will rejoice over it for sorrow will have vanished. Though death will still be present, life spans will be extended and people will enjoy safety and the produce of their vineyards. God's blessing will be on their work and families and He will speedily answer their prayers. Wild animals will lose their ferocity and harmony and safety will prevail under God's just rule.

It's all there for everyone, the free gift of God's grace in salvation, all anyone has to do is reach out and receive it. The remnant of Jews who were prayed for by Isaiah knew what needed to be done and so will the remnant of Jews in the end times. God says to every generation in every land, *"Trust and obey, and you will receive my blessings. Disobey me and you will receive my curses."* The only thing these Jews who offered this prayer had was the knowledge that they could only trust in God's willingness to forgive them by His mercy and grace. They could do nothing to earn that forgiveness. They also knew that God would only forgive them if they repented of their sin and asked Him to forgive

them. God would then give them the ability to accept Jesus as the Savior they need to pay their sin penalty and thus be saved. Have you done that? If you haven't, I would suggest you give it very serious consideration and not delay, because Jesus' return may be just around the corner.